6

WHAT WE BELIEVE

BY

REV. L. P. BOWEN,

PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, MARSHALL, MO

AND AUTHOR OF

THE OLD PREACHER'S STORY.

I believed; therefore have I spoken. Psalm cxvi: 10.

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What We Believe.

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. Rom. i: 16.

1. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as a whole and in all their parts, every chapter, every verse, we embrace heartily as God's own Word; and therefore for us the only infallible rule of faith and practice. In religion we credit nothing without a "Thus saith the Lord." Above all creeds, pulpits, commentaries and arguments of men, it is the One Book of final appeal.

Our Confession of Faith and Catechisms are our favorite expositions of Bible truth, because they magnify the Scriptures at every point and claim no authority whatever except where in evident accord with the Divine Word.

2. In government we are Presbyterian, a government of representative Elders chosen by the people. In doctrine we are Calvinistic; so termed from one of its greatest expounders since the days of Paul. We are both of these, because we are very certain that we find them both in the Bible. That they are both often misunderstood and misrepresented, does not shake our confidence

3. Through the blessed office-work of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, we publish a free salvation to every soul on the face of the earth. In this our pulpits are just as honest, just as earnest, just as successful as any other; having been owned and honored of God in bringing millions of our fallen race to the foot of the cross. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. We believe that God means it when he says—"Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." (Rev. xxii: 18.)

4. At the same time, we rejoice in the fact that Jehovah and not man is God; that the Most High is absolutely sovereign in all things, doing according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, Dan. iv: 35; so that no haphazard chance determines the destiny of any soul. The salvation of no man, the perdition of no man, has ever taken the Omniscient by surprise. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." Acts xv: 18.

5. We believe that man is a free agent, free to choose, free to refuse. We *know* that we acted voluntarily while sinning and equally so when coming to Christ. No man is forced to reject the Saviour; no man is

forced to accept Him. To be eternally lost is man's own fault; it is self-murder. Christ's charge against the sinner is an indictment of the sinner's free will—"Ye *will* not come to Me that ye might have life." John v: 40.

6. No less certain is the guarantee by Omnipotence that Christ should not die in vain; that He should "see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied," Isaiah liii: 11; that there were those definitely and positively given to Him of the Father, John vi: 37. If there were not some absolutely certain to be saved, then Christ's death-agonies might have been for naught and a waste!

7. Though it is every person's duty to repent and cease sinning, yet it is a startling fact that we are all born with a corrupt nature, and are not able of ourselves to change that nature Ps. li: 5, Jer. xiii: 23; therefore no one will ever repent and become pure without the constraining grace of God. Upon the Holy Spirit we are dependent for every good thought, every good impulse, every good resolution. Eph. v: 9. The new birth is God's work, 1 John v: 1. If we are regenerated, sanctified and taken to heaven, it will be through the unmerited favor of the All-Merciful. "By grace are ye saved

through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." Eph. ii: 8.

8. "Do you believe, then, in predestination, fore-ordination, election?"

Most assuredly; but we believe in these Bible doctrines as interpreted by ourselves, not as caricatured by others. There is no fatalism in our creed, and nothing that approaches to fatalism or even looks like it. God is no fatalist, and we have no trouble in believing Him implicitly when He says—"Whom He predestinated, them He also called." Rom. viii: 29-30. "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." Eph. i: 11. "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God." 1 Pet. i: 2. "Knowing brethren beloved, your election of God." 1 Thess. i: 4. "As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed." Acts xiii: 48. There is our creed in God's own words. These, and multitudes of parallel passages, *mean* SOMETHING. We receive them into our hearts and appropriate them trustingly—believing just what they say; nothing more, nothing less. We dare not try to rebut them, quarrel with them, belittle them, or explain them away. By far

the strongest language in our Confession of Faith, are its direct quotations from Scripture.

9. "But is not all this in conflict with what was said before of the free agency of man and of the sinner's responsibility for the loss of his soul?"

As held by ourselves, these doctrines do not and can not conflict. Both are in the Bible; therefore we believe them both. If there is any seeming antagonism, it is in the mistaken or ungenerous construction put upon our doctrines by their assailants. The Confession of Faith distinctly protests that its own intended meaning does not in any way make God the author of sin, nor is violence thereby offered to the freedom of the creature. If any construe it otherwise, then they have wrested its words to suit themselves and to make a point. Never have I seen an opponent of our pure Scriptural Calvinism attempt to state its import, without proceeding at once to argue into our doctrine an alien meaning which we never held and never dreamed of holding; setting up a raw-head-and-bloody-bones of fatalism to frighten the unwary. Certainly we are supposed to understand our own belief, and to have the right to define and interpret it. To

undertake to fasten upon us and upon our Standards a false interpretation which we and our Standards disavow, is immodest, disingenuous and slanderous.

10. "Do you believe that some men will be saved and some be lost, let them do what they will, let them live as they may?"

We believe no such thing, and nothing like it. Any such construction put upon our doctrine is an outrage. Again we leave the matter to God's own clear statement—"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *unto good works* which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them," Eph. ii: 10. "According as he hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be *holy* and *without blame* before Him in *love*, Eph. i: 4. We leave the caviller to fight the Scripture. As God preaches it and as we hold and preach it, good works, blameless lives, holiness and love, are thus bound up with the grand old doctrine and are its certain effect and outcome.

11. "Does not this doctrine, as taught in your Confession of Faith, imply the damnation of infants? that while some may be elected to eternal life, others are elected to eternal woe?"

It implies no such thing.

"But does not your Church hold that there are infants in hell not a span long?"

Such a charge is utterly and maliciously false; one of those old hackneyed calumnies which can be traced to no authority, and for the reiteration of which all decent Christians ought to be ashamed. Our Church teaches, and has always taught precisely the reverse: that all babes, whether in Christendom or heathendom, dying before years of discretion, are elected to eternal life. We believe it rejoicingly, not as a mere human sentiment, but because of firm conviction that we find it in God's Word. Incapable of exercising faith and of performing good works, it seems to us that God's electing love is the very thing, the *only* thing, that does insure the salvation of the little ones.

So confident are we in this faith, that we believe it would have been far better and safer for such perpetrators of persistent falsehoods against fellow Christians, if these defamers had themselves died in infancy!

12. "Is any person who sincerely desires and tries to be saved upon the Gospel terms excluded or discouraged by any of your doctrines?"

Most emphatically, No! Salvation is a

gracious gift, freely proffered, freely bestowed—as free as the air we breathe. It comes of pure grace to every one who is sick of sin for Jesus' sake and truly longs for deliverance through His blood. We teach and believe nothing, *nothing*, NOTHING that can possibly be strained to mean otherwise. Nay, we glory in the freeness, graciousness, fullness of Christ's precious redemption—emphasizing and pressing it to the ends of the world and with the tenderest appeals of the Scriptures. Eze. xxxiii: 11; Matt. xxiii: 37. "Ho every one that thirsteth," is God's invitation and ours.

And here again in this little tract, by the anguish of the Cross, by the value of your never-dying souls, we urge upon our readers this glorious salvation, declaring in God's name that He is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." 2 Pet. iii: 9.

13. "Do you believe that any one truly new-born will ever be lost?"

We hold otherwise. Like David and Peter, he may still have his imperfections, sin sadly, go terribly astray; but God is faithful that promised, and we are "confident of this very thing that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus

Christ." Phil. i: 6. This we hold in no sense that would conduce to carnal security "Sha'l we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid." Rom. vi: 1-2. God's perseverance, not our own weak perseverance, saves us. Our humble trust is summed up in one B ble formula—"Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" 1 Pet. i: 5.

14. "Do you require of persons joining your Church, that they shall adopt your peculiar tenets and believe just as you do?"

Never. We ask no such questions. Though we are thoroughly persuaded in our minds, yet we force our denominational views upon nobody. Our Confession of Faith guards sacredly the God-given right of private judgment The only requisites for membership with us are penitence for sin, personal faith in Christ, a consecrated purpose to live a godly life and to use the means of grace. The doors of the Presbyterian Church stand as widely open as the doors of heaven. All who can rightly enter the one, can rightly enter the other

15. Finally; among our most sacred and cherished doctrines is that of charity to all God's children. We are rivals of no other Church. We invite no conflict; we attempt

no inroads. We bid every Gospel Church Godspeed. We pray that every man's vine and figtree may flourish prosperously. Our own old conservative Church we love the best—her doctrines, her polity, her altars—and we are well content in her pure historic fame, in her zeal for the crown-rights of Jesus, and in the glories to which she looks forward beyond the stars. Meanwhile, along that upward way, we shake hands cordially with all who serve the same Saviour and who look forward in love to His appearing. "And now abideth faith, hope, charity; these three; but the greatest of these is charity." 1 Cor. xiii: 13.

The Old Preacher's Story.

BY REV. L. P. BOWEN.

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